The Battle of the German National Redoubt

— *Operational Phase*

Brigadier General Reuben E. Jenkins, *United States Army*

This article supplements another by the same author "The Battle of The German National Redoubt—Planning Phase" that appeared in the December issue of the MILITARY REVIEW.—The Editor.

The Decision

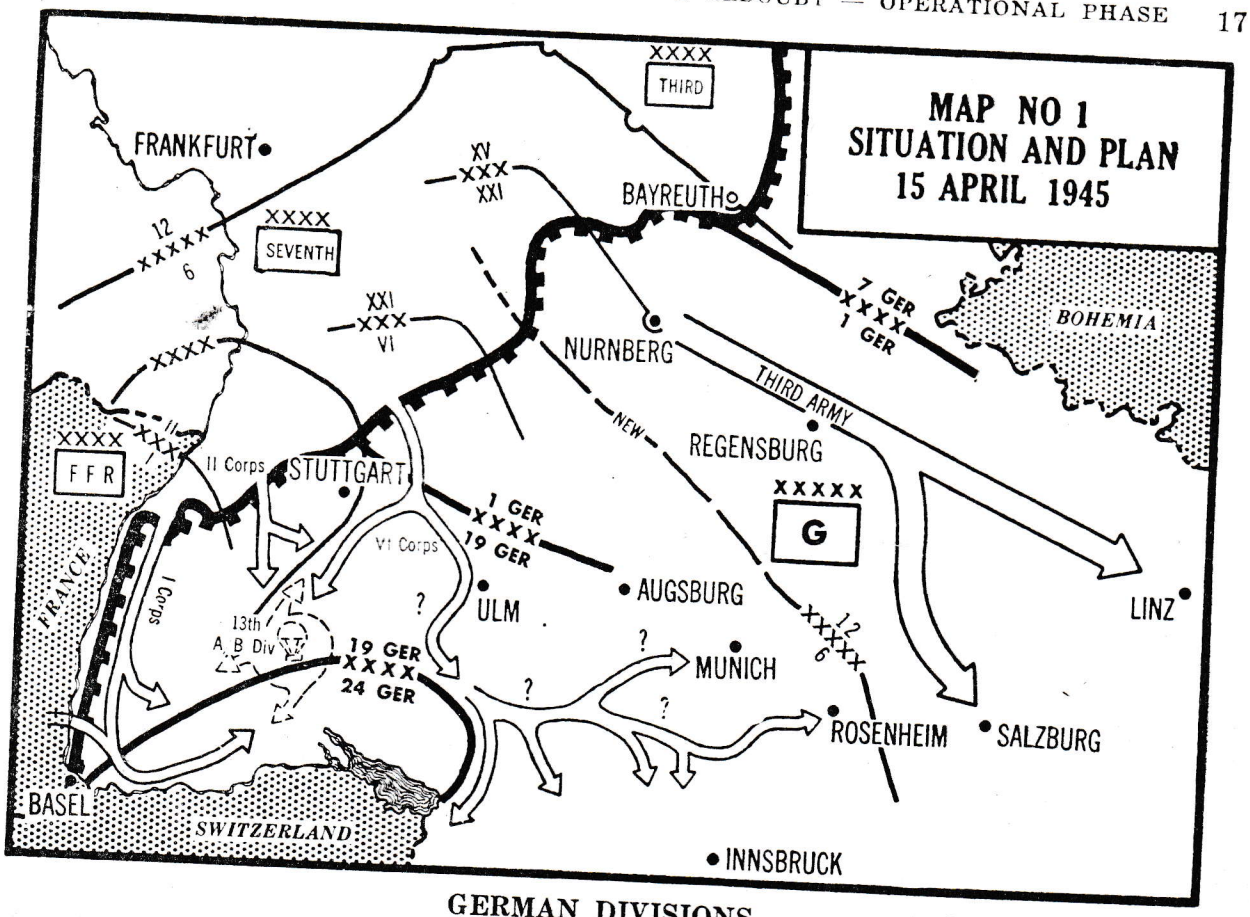
ON 14 April SHAEF completed plans for the next major offensive. These included a material shortening of Seventh Army's front by shifting Third Army, under Twelfth Army Group, to the west for the attack in the direction of Linz to establish contact with the Russians advancing from Vienna, and assigned Sixth Army Group the principal attack mission of clearing up the remainder of south Germany and seizing western Austria (the Redoubt Center) (see Map No. 1). This shortening of the front, plus one additional armored and two infantry divisions and the airborne division released by SHAEF, gave Sixth Army Group the offensive power required.

On 15 April Sixth Army Group was directed to launch the operation to destroy the Nineteenth German Army as quickly as possible, but was directed to hold its left back until the Third Army was ready to open its offensive, probably about 22 April, and thereafter to have the left protect the south flank of Twelfth Army Group as it moved into its new zone.

If the Third Army did not make the progress hoped for, because of strong German reaction from Czechoslovakia, the Sixth Army Group would, after the battle on its right wing, be in a favorable position to swing to the east to cut off any movement into the Redoubt Center battle later.

German Psychology and Morale

Conduct of the battle on the front of Sixth Army Group had to take into serious account the psychology of the German and his present state of morale. The First and Nineteenth German Armies had been heavily mauled west of the Rhine. During the last three weeks they had recovered very substantially in both strength and equipment, but their morale was not good. German individual replacements were not up to standard. Except in a few critical areas where resistance was offered with the usual fanaticism, the Germans were now manifestly "jumpy" and raced for a rear position when confronted with a strong, decisive attack. The violence of the American and French artillery, armor and air was taking the willingness to fight in open country out of them. Furthermore, indications pointed to the fact that German intelligence was poor, and that their signal communications system was breaking up. The German air effort was now practically zero, while our own was "perfection" itself. These latter factors meant that German Army Group G and its armies could know little about what was going on in rear of the Sixth Army Group,



GERMAN DIVISIONS

In Line

1st Army: 409th, 416th, 79th, 212th, 9th, 353d, 246th, 719th Infantry; Massenbach Panzer Division.

19th Army: 559th, 465th, 16th, 257th, 106th, 189th, 405th, 716th Infantry; 1005th and Bauer Infantry Brigades (10 Bns).

In Reserve

1st Army: 616th, 2d, 198th Intantry; 17 SS Pz G; 25th SS (Inf); Von Hobe Pz G Brig.

19th Army: 805th, 47th Infantry.

Note: Of the above, 719th and 246th were remnants; 2d Infantry Division was reduced strength and was refitting.
Bns of 1005th and Bauer Bgs were about 350/500 each.
Other divisions averaged about 7/900 each.
805th was completing mobilization.

and could achieve coordinated reaction to attack only slowly. The possibilities for surprise were good. However, if the weight and direction of any major effort east of the Black Forest were disclosed prematurely, the Germans would run and might reach the Schwabische-Frankische Alps ahead of the French and Seventh Armies' spearheads, where a major, costly offensive would be required to dislodge them. This was the situation most to be avoided by Seventh Army and the French.

Seventh Army, therefore, almost invariably employed narrow, small scale initial offensives, at selected points, so as not to alarm the Germans unduly or prematurely. These offensives were continued until a break had been effected in the German lines sufficiently wide for its purposes, but not of such size as to alarm the

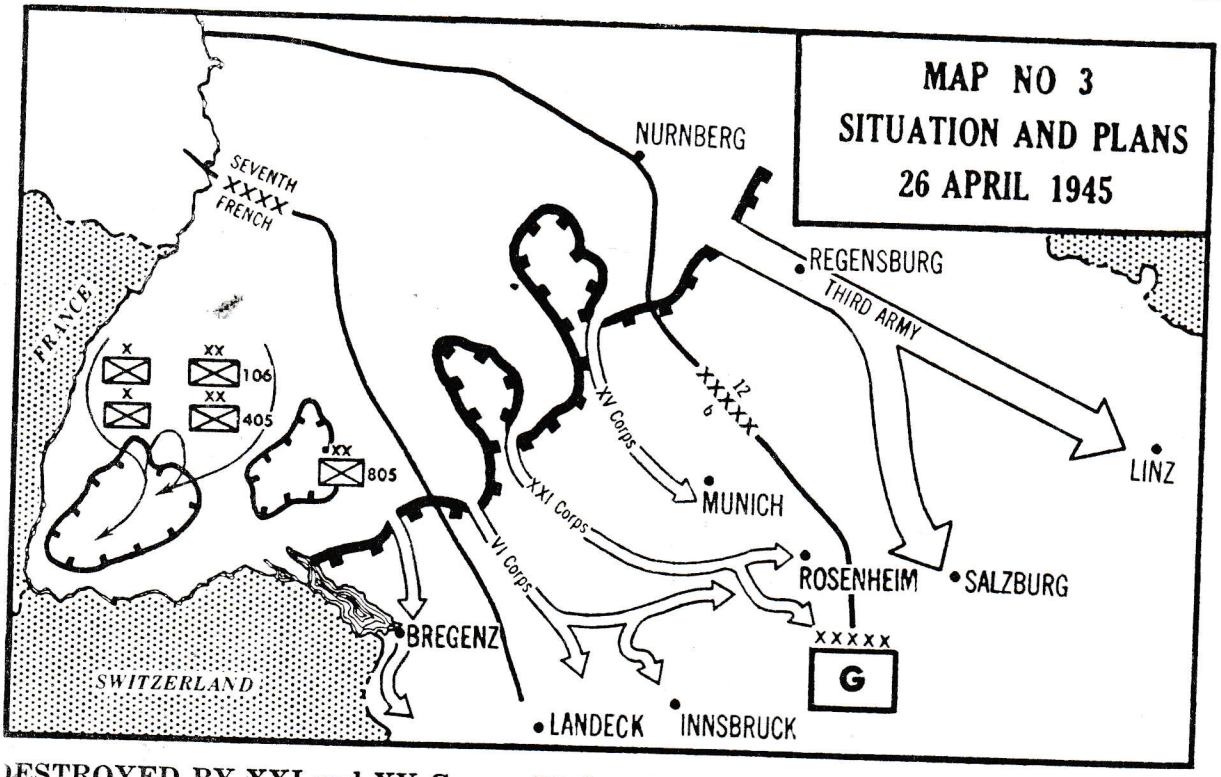
to avoid destruction. The strength and mobility of the II French Corps were not equal to the tasks of isolating Stuttgart and at the same time exploiting *sufficiently deep* with strong forces after a frontal effort against the Nineteenth Army. On the other hand, the VI U.S. Corps was strong in armor and mobility, and was attacking in the zone of the first German Army, from which it would exploit rapidly with strong forces to Lake Constance, deep into the rear of the Nineteenth German Army, *from its flank*. The local and general reserves which were so closely backing up the Nineteenth Army's front opposing the French, instead of being drawn forward or at least held in place by strong local attacks until VI Corps was ready to deliver the *Coup de Grace* in conjunction with the airborne assault, were plunged into headlong flight by a premature major offensive on a broad front that exploded with unexpected violence, but without the proper power and mobility to exploit deeply. On the other hand, the German 47th Division (in reserve) was pulled into battle promptly by VI U.S. Corps and could not get away.

The Nineteenth German Army was already jittery, and it was vital that no part of it be alarmed prematurely. Furthermore, it was highly important to the subsequent pursuit phase that the First French Army not so exhaust itself initially that it would be incapable of a material effort on the right of VI Corps to the east. But now its strongest corps had exhausted itself executing a task assigned primarily to the unused airborne divisions and the powerful VI Corps, the main attack corps of the Group.

The Pursuit

This unexpected turn of events demanded an *immediate* redirection of the VI Corps and a new zone of action for the French (see Map No. 2). The VI Corps, moving south against scattered resistance, approached Ulm on 23 April only to collide again with an armored element of the French which was moving east on Ulm instead of south. After some confusion and delay, the VI Corps renewed its drive on its right, and was well to the south of Ulm by dark 25 April, prepared to begin a swing to the east on order (See Map No. 3).

In the meantime, the XXI U.S. Corps (Major General F. W. Milburn) and the XV U.S. Corps (Lieutenant General W. H. Haislip), in the center and left of the Seventh U.S. Army, were carrying out their part of the plan. The XXI Corps had been moving slowly south into its new zone of action, busily preparing the way for a local breakthrough from its left, with the hope of encircling several divisions of the First German Army by beating them to crossings over the Danube with at least one regimental combat team and armor, and then fanning out behind them and joining eastern elements of VI Corps. It managed to accomplish a goodly portion of this on 26 April. The XV Corps had been having an exceedingly rough time of it at encircled Nurnberg, where elements of three German infantry divisions, led by formidable elements of the 17th SS Panzer Division, had offered a fanatical and useless defense, fighting almost to the death and, incidentally, to the death of Nurnberg. But Third U.S. Army had now taken over in that zone, and XV Corps, after releasing its armored division to Third Army, was moving with time table precision south into its new zone of action, paving the way for a local breakthrough from its left to join up with the east flank of XXI Corps, which it accomplished on 26 April. On the map it might look as if XXI and XV Corps had been "dragging their feet." They had been moving slowly, but for a definite reason and as a part of the master plan. The regrouping of Third Army for its drive had to be concealed and protected.



DESTROYED BY XXI and XV Corps: 719th and 89th (a new arrival).
DECIMATED BY XXI and XV Corps: 198th, 2d, 79th, 17th SS Pz G, 416th, 353d, and 19th (a new arrival).
NEW ARRIVALS, 1st GERMAN ARMY: 151st Tng Div, 553d (Remnants), 616th (Staff and few new elements).
DESTROYED BY FRENCH: 106th, 405th, 805th, and 1005th and Bauer Bgs.

Furthermore, they were *holding* the First German Army in position and decimating it until the right wing of Sixth Army Group could reach a position from which it could be assured of cutting off the German First and Seventh Armies from the Redoubt Center. A less skillfully conducted direct pressure pursuit by these two corps would have permitted the First Army to break loose and flee.

The long lines of communication soon began to drain strength from the Seventh U.S. Army. Though the Germans in rear areas appeared to be as docile as cattle, the possibility of sabotage and assassinations was an ever present, disturbing element. No opportunity for these to break out could be risked. All non-essential combat troops, such as antiaircraft artillery and heavy artillery, had long since been grounded and converted to security troops, while their trucks were employed in tactical troop movements. The more essential combat troops were now also being converted into security troops at the rate of about seven battalions per day. This could not continue indefinitely.

Fortunately, the Redoubt Center was not now so far away. The First German Army's flank was practically wide open. The VI Corps was meeting isolated, but fanatical, resistance, and it was deep past the flank ready to start a swing east. The French were now closing their few remaining reserves east of Lake Constance. The XV Corps had broken the First German Army's right flank loose from the Seventh German Army. Despite its diminishing power, Seventh U.S. Army could only continue to look south and east and

—"keep going until you run out of gasoline, supplies and troops." The trap was now set.

The Swing East

At noon 25 April, the Army Group commander, after personal conference with the Commanding General, Seventh Army, and the Chief of Staff of First French Army, issued oral instructions to them to close the trap and plunge into the Redoubt Center. He studiously avoided the use of the word "pursuit," apparently because all to frequently it is interpreted to mean "throw caution to the winds." The French were directed to plunge into the Alps at Bregenz and move on Landeck. Seventh Army was directed to start a mighty swing with the VI and XXI Corps and the right of the XV Corps around the south of Munich and seal off the Alps in zone; the VI and XXI Corps were to drop off strong forces along the Alps passes and drive on Innsbruck and the valley of the Inn River (see Map No. 3).

On 28 April, VI Corps was against the Redoubt Center with its right and center, while its left was moving east as the XXI Corps' right swung wide around the southwest of Munich, meeting stiffening resistance. The left of the XXI Corps, and the XV Corps were still "holding" the right and center of the First German Army west and north of Munich. The left of the XV Corps from advanced positions, was protecting the right of the Third Army which was heavily engaged with the Seventh German Army at Regensburg. Certainly, only a miracle could preserve the Redoubt Center for long.

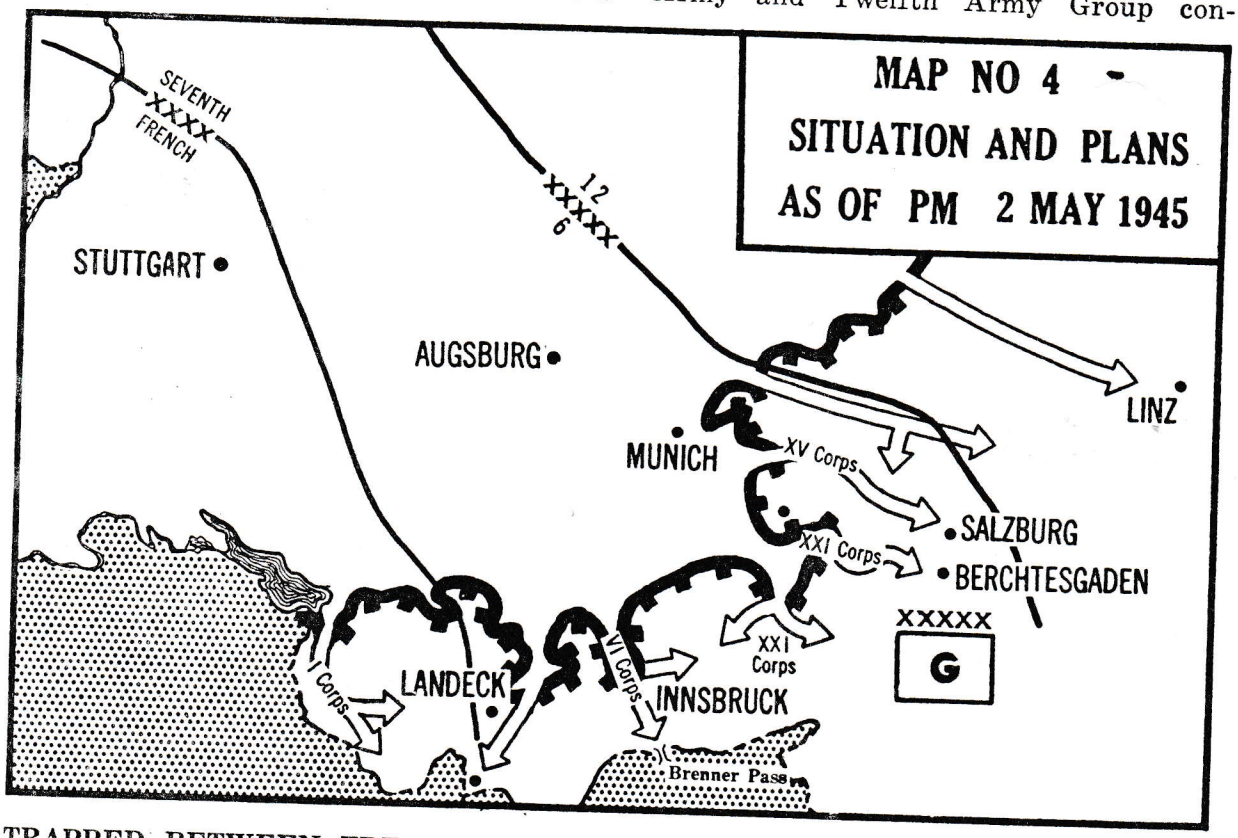
However, bits of disturbing information and rumors were coming in fast. Himmler was reported in Munich. Information indicated that thousands of Germans had already entered the Redoubt Center from Italy, southern Germany and eastern Austria. The Deputy G-3, SHAEF, talked over the situation with G-3, Sixth Army Group by phone after midnight 29-30 April and pleaded for "more speed" to prevent the escape of more Germans into the Redoubt Center. The possible necessity was discussed, of shifting a few divisions to the Seventh U.S. Army from the north where the front was now static, for a quick attack into the Alps. SHAEF was assured that more divisions might be needed for an attack into the Alps, but that very few more Germans would enter the Redoubt Center west of Salzburg, for the reason that the right wing of the Seventh Army was at least forty miles south of the main flank of the First German Army and, despite scattered resistance, was swinging east in everything capable of moving a soldier faster than a walk. Furthermore, the remaining bulk of the First German Army was still north of Munich and could only move by foot.

The bulk of the VI Corps had plunged into the Alps for Innsbruck and Landeck, two key points in the Center, while a portion of the VI Corps' left still moved east along the Alps protecting the right of the XXI Corps, which was now driving around the south of Munich to seal the pass at Rosenheim. The XV Corps' right dashed for Munich and around it. This action and the Third Army's advance were pinching the XV Corps out of the fight. The maneuver was magnificent, but pinching out a complete corps at this stage of the battle might actually lengthen the campaign. This was a powerful corps, skillfully led, that had, by the plan of maneuver, been denied the opportunity to participate in the spectacular manner of which it was capable. To deny this corps the opportunity to exhaust itself in a final decisive effort on the Bavarian plains was a proposal that the Corps Commander, the Army Commander, and the Army Group Commander could not, in good conscience, entertain; but for the moment it looked as if the XV Corps would be relegated

to those pages of history, wherein rest practically all secondary attacks and direct pressure operations—however magnificent.

But its opportunity was suddenly presented. The Germans in the Danube Valley and Czechoslovakia suddenly came alive. They were about to be cut off from the Redoubt Center. Their reaction against the Third Army was prompt and violent. The Third Army's left flank was overextended and seriously exposed. Infantry needed with the advancing armored spearheads in the Valley of the Danube had to be diverted to the exposed flank. This retarded the rate of advance. One of the Third Army's objectives was Salzburg, the last entrance to the Redoubt Center from the north. By 1 May, the XV Corps' right had pushed past Munich, where it left a division on security duty after a heavy engagement, and was facing east. The XXI Corps had pinched the XV Corps out and was almost astride the Seventh Army's and Sixth Army Group's east boundary, facing east (see Map No. 4).

In view of the situation and the importance of closing the Salzburg pass as quickly as possible, the Sixth Army Group requested Salzburg as an objective. Third Army and Twelfth Army Group con-



TRAPPED BETWEEN FRENCH AND VI CORPS: Remnants of: 47th, 246th, 257th, and 559th.

TRAPPED BETWEEN VI AND XXI CORPS: Remnants of 189th, 465th, and miscellaneous Russian units.

CONFRONTING LEFT OF XXI CORPS AND XV CORPS: Remnants of: 2d, 198th, 19th, 553d, 79th, 17th SS Pz G, 151st Tng, Von Hobe Pz G Bg, 616th.

Complete Divs (Reserves): 9th Hungarian (Inf), 25th SS Infantry.

curred promptly by telephone, after which SHAEF, by telephone at noon on 2 May, directed the Sixth Army Group to capture Salzburg and drive into the Redoubt from that point. SHAEF also established a new boundary between the Sixth and Twelfth Army Groups, confirming it by radio the next day (see Map No. 4).

The Seventh Army now turned the XV Corps (which now had the 86th Division, from the right of the Third Army, attached) loose on Salzburg, and at the same time turned the XXI Corps on Berchtesgaden. Both the XV Corps and XXI Corps reacted promptly, broke through the German front, and raced for Salzburg and Berchtesgaden, fanning out in the rear of the Germans as they plunged east. On 3 May they counted over 60,000 prisoners between them, including the complete, reserve 9th Hungarian Division of over 9,000 by XV Corps. By late 4 May, the bulk of the remainder of the First German Army either had been encircled or had escaped east.

The Redoubt Center is Split in Two

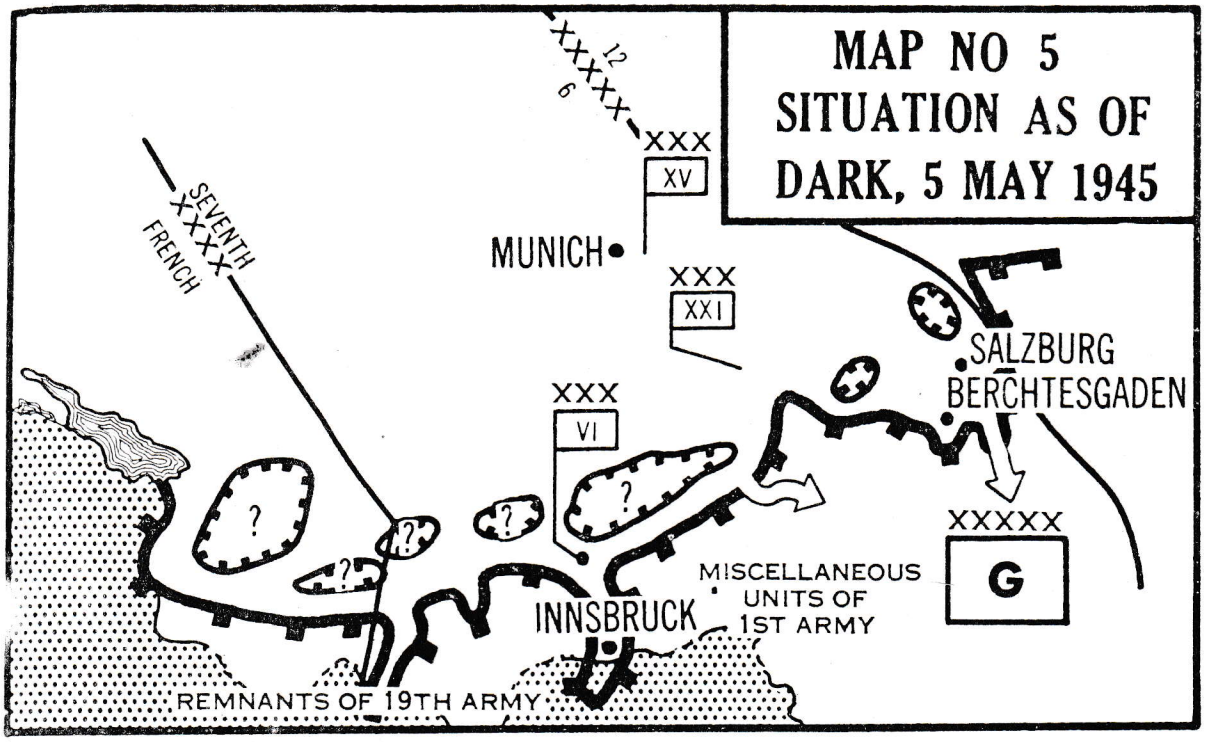
In the meantime, the French were fighting their way into the Redoubt along the Swiss border. The VI Corps had, amid snow storms in the high Alps, captured Landeck and Innsbruck, and had launched an attack south of Innsbruck, behind which strong armor and a mobile Reconnaissance Troop had been posted. These reserves raced completely through the Alps on 3 May and at 1051 were fourteen miles south of the Brenner Pass, in contact with the 88th United States Division in Italy, where the Germans had surrendered the day before. This move so surprised the German units bivouacked along the road through the Redoubt Center, that the flying columns were on them, among them. and through them, before they realized what was happening (see Map No. 5).

Army Group G Surrenders

With Innsbruck, Landeck and Brenner Pass captured, any "Plan" the Germans may have had to hold out in the Redoubt Center was now impossible of execution. The Commander of German Army Group G, General Schulz, definitely had had enough and, with instructions from Field Marshal Kesselring, late 3 May by radio, asked for information as to with whom he should deal for a surrender and how to reach him. He was instructed to contact the Commanding General, Sixth United States Army Group, General Devers, and how and where to reach him. He was also told that if *unconditional surrender* was unacceptable, not to appear for any discussions. On 4 May, Salzburg fell and on 5 May Bertesgaden (The Eagle's Nest) fell (see Map No. 5) to XV Corps.

Complete confusion reigned in German Army Group G. The remnants of the Twenty-fourth German Army had been absorbed in remnants of the Nineteenth Army and only its staff was intact. The Commander of the Nineteenth Army was surrendering everything in his zone unconditionally to the Commanding General, VI Corps, at Innsbruck, apparently without the knowledge of the Commanding General Twenty-fourth Army, Commanding General First Army or the Commanding General Army Group G. He did not know that the Commanding General of Army Group G had offered to surrender the entire Group. All Germans in the western zone of action were fleeing into the zone of the VI Corps to escape the fury of the French. Troops of the First German Army were coming out of the hills and woods by the hundreds with their hands up.

Since 17 April, the Nineteenth German Army had yielded approximately 200,000 prisoners to the First French Army alone. The Seventh U. S. Army had collected approximately 400,000 from the



REMAINING DIVISIONS' DESTRUCTION COMPLETED:

19th Army: Remnants of 47th, 257th, 189th, 465th, 246th, 559th.

1st Army: Remnants of 2d, 151st, 198th, 19th, 36th, 416th, 79th, 553d, 616th, and Von Hube Pz G Bg.

Complete 9th Hungarian.

OPPOSING FRENCH AND VI CORPS: Miscellaneous units.

OPPOSING XXI and XV Corps: Remnants of 38th SS, 17th SS Pz G, 407th and miscellaneous units.

ESCAPED: 25th SS (Inf).

German Nineteenth, First, and Seventh Armies, about 200,000 of them being yielded by First Army since 27 April. These 600,000 prisoners totaled much more than the initial, combined combat strengths of the First French and Seventh United States Armies. It did not seem possible that more than a mere handful of Germans had managed to reach the Redoubt Center. Hence, General Devers was prepared to accept the surrender, of a few higher headquarters and a few service elements in the Alps. Such was the state of German Army Group G after eighteen days of American and French blitz.

On 5 May, General Foerstch, commanding the First German Army, had representing General Schulz, appeared near Salzburg with his emissaries and requested audience with General Devers at Haar, Bavaria (Headquarters XV Corps) as quickly as possible. He was presented to Generals Devers, Patch (Seventh Army) and Haislip (XV Corps) at about 1330 after having read the unconditional terms handed to him. The terms were discussed, during which he disclosed the sorry state to which the magnificient German Army Group G had been reduced. He gave his listeners an insight to the principal contributing factors, which may be summarized as: superior and violent allied air power which made daylight movement of the Germans practically impossible, violent allied artil-

lery and armored action, lack of proper German signal communications and intelligence, speed and power of American and French maneuver, and dogged determination to maintain the weight and speed of pursuit to the vital objectives regardless of difficulties.

During the discussion the myth of a "provisioned" Redoubt was exploded. General Foertsch asked that arrangements be made to feed the Germans in the Alps, stating that he had "perhaps six days of food" in the Army Group dumps, and that no other food or supplies were available in the mythical, large underground storehouses of the National Socialists. When asked what number of men from Army Group G were cut off in the Alps, he indicated 250,000, possibly 350,000, in an assortment of remnants. This number astounded his listeners. It did not seem possible. (The final count proved the higher estimate more nearly correct.) The fact that the greatly advertised "Redoubt Center," now holding over 250,000 men, was surrendering so soon was almost unbelievable. General Devers, said to General Foertsch, bluntly: ". . . Understand, this is *unconditional* surrender! . . ." General Foertsch replied, with almost uncontrollable emotion: "I assure you, sir, I have no power to do *anything* against this."

Shortly thereafter the instrument was signed which delivered into Allied hands, as of noon the next day, Europe's strongest defensive position—the Austrian Alps.

Whether the National Socialists really had hoped for a long and final stand in western Austria may still be debatable. It is a rather strange coincidence that such leaders of Junker aristocracy, and in such numbers, as were captured in this area should be found there together. For example, Reich Marshal Goering, Field Marshals Von Rundstedt, Von Leeb and Wilhelm List, and Admiral Horthy of Hungary were all rounded up along with approximately 460 general officers of lesser importance.

The total bag of prisoners of war of Sixth Army Group since 17 April now was slightly over 900,000. It had, indeed, been a glorious eighteen days of battle, many of which were of the most violent sort, and of unsurpassed speed, considering the hostile resistance, demolitions, weather, rivers, mountains and other natural obstacles encountered. An American and French "Blitz" composed of air power, armor, artillery and mobile infantry had, in a breathtaking two and one-half weeks, overrun the National Redoubt and had sliced through its very heart. Any last hope of the National Socialists had vanished. Two days later, the entire German war machine surrendered unconditionally to SHAEF at Rheims.

During the war in Europe, I had the heavy responsibility of sending into action the gallant sons of America, knowing full well that many would not come back alive. That is a commander's responsibility in a time of impelling need to defeat a menacing enemy. I did everything in my power to insure a sound plan of action and to implement this plan with the necessary troops and matériel to keep our losses at a minimum. Throughout this campaign the welfare and best interests of our men were always close to the hearts of their commanders of every grade.

General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower